

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 809

By Watson

A RESOLUTION to recognize Dr. Laura Ellen Witherspoon on the occasion of her retirement.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly should pause to specially recognize those estimable physicians who have dedicated their professional careers and personal excellence to improving the quality of life for their fellow citizens; and

WHEREAS, Laura Ellen Witherspoon, M.D., of Signal Mountain is one such estimable physician who evinces the greatest integrity and probity in all her chosen endeavors; and

WHEREAS, the eldest of six children, Dr. Laura Witherspoon was born at Erlanger Hospital in Chattanooga on April 17, 1959, to John Knox and Norma Witherspoon; she grew up on Signal Mountain and graduated from Red Bank High School, where she would later become one of the first inductees into the school's Hall of Fame; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Witherspoon received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Molecular Biology in 1981 from Vanderbilt University, where she was a member of a championship-winning intramural volleyball team and a member of Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society; and

WHEREAS, choosing a career in medicine, she graduated with honors from Vanderbilt University School of Medicine in 1985; upon her graduation, Dr. Laura Witherspoon was presented with the School of Medicine Award of Distinction for Medical Education, which is given to a student exemplifying outstanding qualities in scholarship, leadership, and humanitarian service; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Witherspoon completed her residency training in General Surgery at the University of California, San Francisco's San Joaquin Valley Program in Medical Education in Fresno, California, from 1985 to 1990; and

WHEREAS, having gained the respect and admiration of both her staff and colleagues during her residency, Dr. Laura Witherspoon was presented with the House Staff Research Award for 1989-1990 and won the Northern California Region of the American College of Surgery Committee on Trauma Resident Paper Competition for her research in a technique to diagnose internal abdominal injuries in 1990; and

WHEREAS, in 1990, she entered active duty as a staff general surgeon in the United States Air Force with the 645th Medical Group at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, having previously served on inactive duty from 1981 to 1990 as a member of the Air Force Medical Service Corps; and

WHEREAS, the Air Force facility was not only a referral center for the military but also a teaching hospital for physician training, and Major Witherspoon served on the faculties of both Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, and the Uniformed University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, Maryland, from 1991 to 1994; and

WHEREAS, during the deployment of more than half of the hospital's surgical staff during the Gulf wars, Major Witherspoon's services were required to care for all the remaining patients until reservist surgeons arrived to provide support; and

WHEREAS, for distinguishing herself in the performance of outstanding service to the United States as a surgeon, clinician, administrator, and educator, Major Laura Witherspoon was recognized by the U.S. Air Force with the Meritorious Service Medal on May 12, 1994; and

WHEREAS, Doctor Witherspoon returned home to Tennessee in 1994 to practice surgery, and her contributions to health care, medical education, and physician leadership during the ensuing twenty-eight years have been exemplary; and

WHEREAS, as a clinical surgeon, she is an acknowledged expert in diseases and surgery of the breast and is the director for breast services in her practice group and at Erlanger Medical Center in Chattanooga; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Laura Witherspoon is a strong advocate for her patients and the healthcare community; as an educator, she has influenced the careers of countless young surgeons-in-training, mentored her younger colleagues and partners, and advocated for women in the field of surgery; and

WHEREAS, an accomplished professional, Dr. Witherspoon is a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons and a member of the Board of Governors of American College; she has participated in clinical research, resulting in many publications, book chapters, and presentations, and holds an associate professorship in surgery at the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga Unit, College of Medicine; and

WHEREAS, no stranger to accolades, Dr. Witherspoon was recently awarded the 2021 Augustus McCravey, M.D., Lifetime Achievement Award by the University of Tennessee Health Science Center College of Medicine, Chattanooga; this prestigious honor is presented annually in recognition of the recipient's lifetime of achievements as a physician; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Laura Witherspoon is wholly dedicated to her community, having served on numerous hospital, medical, and community committees and boards, as well as in leadership positions in many professional organizations, both locally and nationally, over the years; and

WHEREAS, a faithful and active member of her church, Dr. Witherspoon has served on the Vestry of her church, led and facilitated Disciple Bible Studies and adult Christian formation classes, and participated in outreach programs such as Salvation Army Angel Tree and Children's Nutrition Program of Haiti; in 2013, she cofounded St. Isidore's Ministry to provide meals for people in need in her community; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Laura Witherspoon enjoys the loving support of her husband, Dr. Harold David Head, and she is the proud mother of Scott W. Head and Allison S. Head; and

WHEREAS, throughout her estimable career, Dr. Witherspoon has demonstrated the utmost professionalism, ability, and integrity, winning the unbridled respect and admiration of her colleagues, her patients, and the good people of Tennessee and this nation; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we extend to Dr. Laura Ellen Witherspoon our heartfelt wishes for a happy and fulfilling retirement and every continued success in her future endeavors.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy and upon proper request made to the appropriate clerk, the language appearing immediately following the State seal appear without House or Senate designation.